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AUTHOR Bachiochi, Peter D.; Barnes-Farrell, Janet L.
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ABSTRACT

A survey of 80 management, supervisory, and administrative level employees in a small private hospital (32 responses) in the northeastern United States examined beliefs about the relative effectiveness of different career strategies and worker characteristics, such as age, work experience, company experience, organizational level, and gender, associated with the reported use of 12 career mobility strategies: developing skills/expertise; maintaining subordinate relationships; acquiring attitudes/behaviors of superiors; appearing competitive; use of mentors/sponsors; self-nomination; extending work involvement; networking; career guidance; recreation with superiors; use of cliques/peer groups; and postponing family for career. Investigation of reported use of the strategies perceived to be most and least effective indicated that the use of the most effective strategies was systematically related to labor market experience and worker age. Intraorganizational factors like company tenure and managerial level were not predictive of the use of the most effective strategies. Additional research is needed on the extent to which the relative desirability of particular strategies generalizes to other types of organizations and occupations. The study's small sample size and cross-sectional nature limited questions raised by workers' survey responses. (NLA)

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Perceived Effectiveness and Reported Use of Career Strategies in a Service Organization

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Peter D. Bachiochi

IBM Corporation

and

Janet L. Barnes-Farrell

University of Connecticut

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Abstract

A survey of employees in a small private hospital examined beliefs about the relative effectiveness of different career strategies, and worker characteristics associated with the reported use of career mobility strategies. Investigation of reported use of the strategies perceived to be most and least effective indicated that use of the most effective strategies was systematically related to labor market experience and worker age.

Perceived Effectiveness and Reported Use of Career Strategies in a Service Organization

Workers employ a wide variety of strategies for managing their careers (Becker & Strauss, 1956; Coates and Pellegrin, 1957; Fitzgerald & Rounds, 1989; Gould & Penley, 1984; Hout, 1984; Martin & Strauss, 1956). Systematic individual differences in worker preferences for particular career management strategies are of interest in understanding career development these strategies may be differentially effective in influencing upward mobility. Thus, differences in patterns of strategy use may have practical implications for understanding inter-group differences in career progression.

The current paper reports the results of a field study that focused on worker beliefs about the effectiveness and frequency of use of twelve specific career strategies which were identified on the basis of a comprehensive review of empirical research on worker career mobility strategies. The extent to which personal characteristics such as worker age, work experience, company experience, organizational level, and gender are predictive of individual differences in the reported use of the strategies considered to be most and least effective in this organization was also investigated.

Method

Subjects

A career survey was distributed to members of the management, supervisory, and administrative levels of a small private hospital in the northeastern United States (N=80). Response rate to the survey was 40% (n = 32). Five levels of the company were represented; mean tenure with the company was 4.3 years (SD = 3.8). Sixty-five percent of the respondents were females; respondents ranged in age from 17 to 47 years (M = 33 years, SD = 8.0).

Procedure and Materials

The career strategy survey presented definitions of the twelve career strategies that have appeared most often in the extant research literature (see Table 1). Respondents completed twelve items which asked them to rate the effectiveness of each strategy for career advancement using a 7-point scale (1= not at all effective; 7=extremely effective) . They completed an additional twelve items which asked them to rate the frequency with which they use each of these strategies (7-point scale: 1=never; 7=always). In addition, the survey requested basic demographic and organizational information: Age, sex, years employed at the hospital, years of total employment, and organizational level. The order of presentation of effectiveness ratings and frequency of use ratings was counterbalanced, and all surveys were completed anonymously.

Insert Table 1 about here

Measures

Mean perceived effectiveness and frequency of use ratings for each strategy were calculated for the entire sample in order to determine the relative desirability of the twelve career strategies under consideration. In addition, four strategies were identified as highly effective strategies (see Table 1): at least 70% of the respondents rated the strategy as effective (5, 6, or 7 on the 7-point scale). Frequency of use ratings for those strategies were averaged to produce a composite score for Use of Effective Strategies. Similarly, a criterion of 70% agreement was used to identify a subset of three strategies which were perceived as ineffective in this organization (i.e. 1, 2, or 3 on the 7-point scale). Frequency of use ratings for those strategies were averaged to produce a Use of Ineffective Strategies composite.

Results

As seen in Table 1, Skill Development was seen as the most effective career strategy in this organization (M=5.94) and Postponing a Family was seen as the least effective career strategy (M = 3.41). The same two strategies were reported as being used most frequently and least frequently, respectively.

Total years of employment (M=13.37, sd=6.44) was positively correlated with the Use of Effective Strategies composite (r=.40, p<.05). When the effects of worker age were partialled from the above relationship, total years of employment remained a significant predictor of the Use of Effective Strategies (partial r=.54, p<.01). Total years of employment also acted as a suppressor of the relationship between worker age and the Use of Effective Strategies composite. When the effects of total years of employment were controlled, worker age was positively correlated with the Use of Effective Strategies composite (partial r=.42, p<.05).

Neither organizational level nor tenure with the company were significantly predictive of the Use of Effective Strategies composite. Similarly, no gender differences were observed in the reported frequency of use of effective strategies. None of the worker characteristics investigated were significantly correlated with the Use of Ineffective Strategies composite.

Discussion

One purpose of this study was to examine employee beliefs about the relative desirability of a wide range of career management strategies that have been identified as techniques for enhancing career mobility. A clear rank ordering among the strategies emerged, and it was possible to identify a number of strategies for which there was considerable agreement about their high effectiveness, or about their relatively low effectiveness.

In addition, our findings suggest that there are indeed systematic

individual differences among workers which are related to the frequency with which they report using particular career strategies. In particular, worker age and total employment experience were associated with the reported frequency of use of effective career management strategies. It should perhaps be expected that those who are older and have the most work force experience would be most likely to report using the "effective" strategies. They have had the greatest opportunity to learn to identify and use career management strategies that appear to enhance career mobility. However, the fact that age is predictive of the frequency with which effective strategies are used, even when employment experience is held constant, suggests that other variables beyond simple labor force participation may be at play. Research which utilizes longitudinal designs is needed in order explore potential developmental explanations for these observations. It is also interesting to note that *intra*-organizational variables like company tenure and managerial level were *not* predictive of the use of the most effective strategies.

Because environmental factors such as organizational structure, company policy, and economic climate may have a significant impact on worker perceptions about the effectiveness of classes of strategies, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which the relative desirability of particular strategies generalizes to other types of organizations and occupations. Furthermore, the small sample size and cross-sectional nature of this study limits our ability to ask some questions which are raised by workers' responses to the survey. Nevertheless, we believe that the data provided by this study furnish some fascinating insights into employee beliefs about a wide variety of career enhancement techniques, and suggest several interesting research questions regarding developmental and environmental factors which may affect worker career management strategies.

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Table 1. Effectiveness/Use Ratings for Individual Strategies and Composites

Strategy	Effectiveness Rating		Rank	Use Rating		Rank
	M	(SD)		M	(SD)	
Developing Skills/Expertise[a]	5.94	(1.10)	1	6.06	(1.07)	1
Maintaining Subordinate Relationships[a]	5.50	(1.24)	2	5.90	(0.99)	2
Acquiring Attitudes/Behaviors of Superiors[a]	5.31	(1.28)	3	4.81	(1.40)	6
Appearing Competitive[a]	5.28	(0.99)	4	5.15	(1.32)	3
Use of Mentors/Sponsors	5.19	(1.25)	5	4.97	(1.23)	4
Self-nomination	5.03	(0.96)	6	4.88	(1.29)	5
Extended Work Involvement	4.94	(1.32)	7	4.50	(1.02)	8
Networking	4.43	(1.48)	8	4.53	(1.39)	7
Career Guidance	4.28	(1.53)	9	4.41	(1.43)	9
Recreation with Superiors[b]	3.84	(1.53)	10	3.38	(1.31)	11
Use of Cliques/Peer Groups[b]	3.75	(1.32)	11	3.47	(1.54)	10
Postponing Family for Career[b]	3.41	(1.52)	12	2.75	(1.67)	12
Most Effective Strategies Composite	5.51	(0.80)		5.48	(0.88)	
Least Effective Strategies Composite	3.67	(0.97)		3.20	(0.89)	

[a] These strategies met the "most effective strategies" criterion.

[b] These strategies met the "least effective strategies" criterion.